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ABSTRACT

If teachers can be trained to attribute poor student performance to such things as insufficient instruction, low expenditure of effort, or poor strategy rather than students' lack of ability, they will modify instruction or provide a new learning strategy. For this to happen, teachers must first display attributional thinking about their own life events which will enhance a sense of control and self-esteem by internalizing positive events and externalizing negative events. An inservice workshop to enhance personal styles of attribution association with greater student motivation to perform academic tasks was held. Twenty-six teachers who completed a program consisting of lecture, modeling, role-playing, and self-analysis displayed significantly different Attribution Style Questionnaire scores from the 28 comparison teachers; women changed significantly more than men. Findings suggest that an educational intervention can modify attributional thinking of teachers to enhance their personal sense of control. The workshop approach was effective in modifying teachers' causal thinking about themselves and changed their thinking about students' behavior in ways that did not diminish their own sense of self-efficacy. (LL)

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Attribution Training for Teachers

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Attribution Training for Teachers

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Attribution Training for Teachers

Abstract

The use of the education model of consultation, i.e., an inservice workshop, to enhance personal styles of attribution association with greater student motivation to perform academic tasks was explored. Twenty-six teachers who completed a program consisting of lecture, modeling, role-playing and self-analysis (through two instruments also used as dependent measures) displayed significantly different (in desired direction) Attribution Style Questionnaire scores from the 28 comparison teachers. Women changed significantly more than men. Implications for consultation (developing readiness for change) are outlined.

The study evaluated the effectiveness of an educational intervention designed to foster thinking patterns in teachers associated with student achievement motivation (Dweck, 1986). Indirect service delivery using the Education and Training Model (Gallessich, 1982), consisting of an on-site workshop with follow-up assignments, was viewed as relatively low cost and non-threatening. A secondary purpose of the study was to further validate two measures of the dependent variable, attributional thinking. By attributional thinking (Heider, 1958) is meant the attribution of causes for events, in this case by teachers both for positive and negative events in their own lives and for the academic successes and failures of their students. The reasoning was if teachers can be trained to attribute poor student performance to such things as insufficient instruction, low expenditure of effort, or poor strategy versus lack of ability, then they will modify instruction, encourage students to try or provide a new learning strategy. For this to happen, teachers must first display attributional thinking about their own life events that enhances a sense of control and self esteem, namely to internalize positive events and externalize negative events (Seligman, 1983).

Method

Participants

Inservice teachers whose data were complete comprised the participants. There were 15 women and 11 men in the

treatment groups and 26 women and 4 men in the comparison group. Forty-four teachers were full-time faculty in two middle schools and 10 were vocational faculty. All but eight had more than four years teaching experience.

Instruments

Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ). Respondents are asked to generate the cause for six positive and six negative events and then to rate the cause on a seven-point scale corresponding to the internality, stability, and globality dimensions of causality (Peterson, Semmel, von Baeyer, Abramson, Metalsky and Seligman, 1982). Internal reliabilities of the two composite scores (positive and negative life events) were .75 and .72 (Cronbach's alpha). Validity was established with a variety of laboratory, academic, and personality measures.

Teacher Attributions for Academic Performance Scale (TAAPS). This scale is comprised of 11 items representing attributions teachers make for student academic performance, six of which reflect students' internal (e.g., ability) and five an external (e.g., task difficulty) locus of control (Hall, Villeme & Burley, 1989). Respondents indicate on a six-point scale the importance a given attribution has for the academic performance of high and low achieving students. Spearman Brown and Cronbach's alpha's ranged from .725 to .567 for the four scores yielded (internal and external composites for high and low achieving students).

Procedure

Entry into the system was formally gained by the two consultant-trainers. Teachers (volunteers) were given inservice

credits toward recertification for attending the one-day workshops. Following administration of the two instruments was a lecturette on attribution, self-efficacy and attribution training. The ASQ was self-scored and interpreted with fuller explanations of the above concepts. The consultants modeled scenarios of student success and failures and how teachers should respond to encourage future effort. Teachers rehearsed the behaviors thus viewed through small group work on cases designed for skill practice reinforced by general discussions of appropriate responses. Finally, the instruments were re-administered and teachers prepared for a follow-up assignment.

Results

There were no significant differences on the two ASQ and four TAAPS scores between the two treatment groups and these and the comparison group prior to the workshop. The composite positive and negative ASQ scores of the treatment groups (combined for remaining analysis) changed significantly as hypothesized (the positive score went up and negative down) and the treatment group's post scores differed significantly from the comparison group as well. While there were no sex differences on the pretest scores for the ASQ, women teachers in the experimental group changed significantly more than men. Changes in the treatment group remained stable over time.

The only significant pre-post test change for the experimental teachers on the TAAPS was a significant increase in external attributions for low achieving students (in hypothesized direction), a change that was significantly more

pronounced for women. This effect held over time also. There were no significant correlations among the ASQ and the TAAPS scores.

Discussion

In answer to the question, "Can an educational intervention modify attributional thinking of teachers to enhance their personal sense of control?", this study suggests a tentative "yes". Participants significantly increased ascriptions for success and failures in the hypothesized directions on the ASQ. Results on the measures of their ascriptions for students' academic achievements were less dramatic. Given that the two dependent measures were found to have no statistical relationship, it may be that a two-step training process is required, first, to modify teachers' causal thinking about themselves and, second, to change their thinking about students' behavior in ways that do not diminish their own sense of self efficacy. A workshop appeared to be both an effective and efficient means to set the stage for openness to further consultation.

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